

desired reading material. They locate those materials or closely related substitutes from the library collection of large type or braille volumes, tape cassettes, and open-reel talking books. They complete the paperwork and give or mail them to the borrower.

To extend library services to more patrons, many libraries operate bookmobiles. Bookmobile drivers take trucks stocked with books to designated sites on a regular schedule. Bookmobiles serve community organizations such as shopping centers, apartment complexes, schools, and nursing homes. They may also be used to extend library service to patrons living in remote areas. Depending on local conditions, drivers may operate a bookmobile alone or may be accompanied by a library technician.

When working alone, the drivers perform many of the same functions as a library assistant in a main or branch library. They answer patrons' questions, receive and check out books, collect fines, maintain the book collection, shelve materials, and occasionally operate audio-visual equipment to show slides or films. They participate and may assist in planning programs sponsored by the library such as reader advisory programs, used book sales, or outreach programs. Bookmobile drivers keep track of their mileage, the materials lent out, and the amount of fines collected. In some areas, they are responsible for maintenance of the vehicle and any photocopiers or other equipment in it. They record statistics on circulation and the number of people visiting the bookmobile. Drivers may also record requests for special items from the main library and arrange for the materials to be mailed or delivered to a patron during the next scheduled visit. Many bookmobiles are equipped with personal computers and CD-ROM systems linked to the main library system; this allows bookmobile drivers to reserve or locate books immediately. Some bookmobiles now offer Internet access to users.

Because bookmobile drivers may be the only link some people have to the library, much of their work is helping the public. They may assist handicapped or elderly patrons to the bookmobile, or shovel snow to assure their safety. They may enter hospitals or nursing homes to deliver books to patrons who are bedridden.

The schedules of bookmobile drivers depend on the size of the area being served. Some of these workers go out on their routes every day, while others go only on certain days. On these other days, they work at the library. Some also work evenings and weekends to give patrons as much access to the library as possible.

### Employment

Library assistants and bookmobile drivers held about 127,000 jobs in 1998. Over one-half of these workers were employed by local government in public libraries; most of the remaining worked in school libraries. Opportunities for flexible schedules are abundant; over one-half of these workers were on part-time schedules.

### Job Outlook

Opportunities should be good for persons interested in jobs as library assistants or bookmobile drivers through 2008. Turnover of these workers is quite high, reflecting the limited investment in training and subsequent weak attachment to this occupation. This work is attractive to retirees, students, and others who want a part-time schedule, and there is a lot of movement into and out of the occupation. Many openings will become available each year to replace workers who transfer to another occupation or leave the labor force. Some positions become available as library assistants move within the organization. Library assistants can be promoted to library technicians, and eventually supervisory positions in public service or technical service areas. Advancement opportunities are greater in larger libraries and may be more limited in smaller ones.

Employment is expected to grow about as fast as the average for all occupations through 2008. The vast majority of library assistants and bookmobile drivers work in public or school libraries. Efforts to contain costs in local governments and academic institutions of all types may result in more hiring of library support staff than librarians. Because most are employed by public institutions, library assistants and

bookmobile drivers are not directly affected by the ups and downs of the business cycle. Some of these workers may lose their jobs, however, if there are cuts in government budgets.

### Sources of Additional Information

Information about a career as a library assistant can be obtained from:

☛ Council on Library/Media Technology, P.O. Box 951, Oxon Hill, MD 20750. Internet: <http://library.ucr.edu/COLT>

Public libraries and libraries in academic institutions can provide information about job openings for library assistants and bookmobile drivers.

(See the introductory part of this section for information on working conditions, training requirements, and earnings.)

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## Order Clerks

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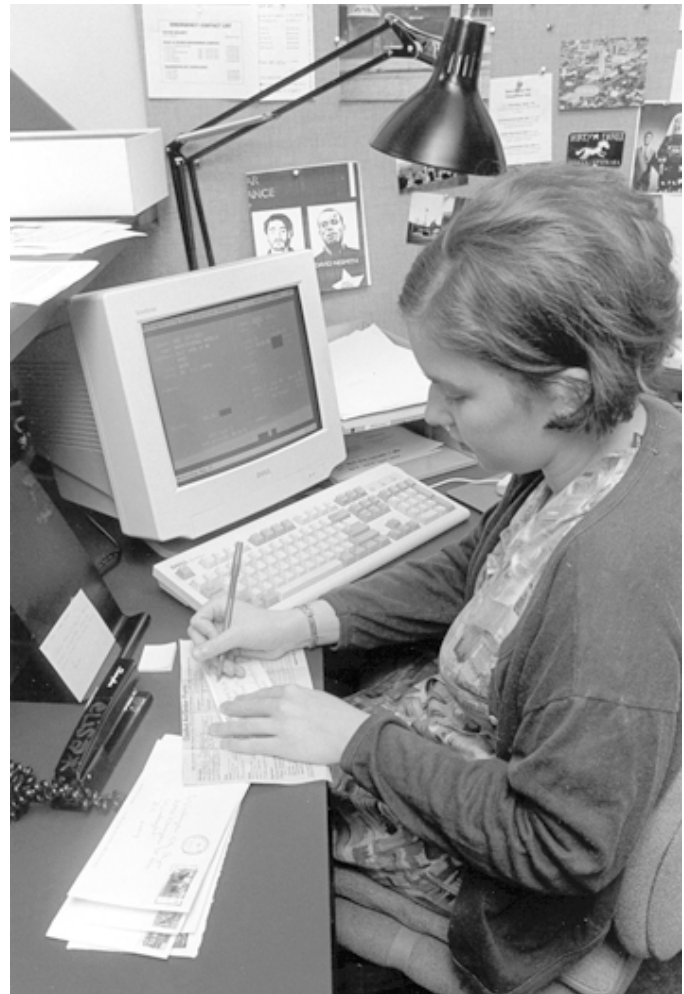
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### Nature of the Work

Order clerks receive and process incoming orders for a wide variety of goods or services, such as spare parts for machines, consumer appliances, gas and electric power connections, film rentals, and articles of clothing. They are sometimes called order-entry clerks, customer service representatives, sales representatives, order processors, or order takers.

Orders for materials, merchandise, or services can come from inside or from outside of an organization. In large companies with many work sites, such as automobile manufacturers, clerks order parts and



*A clerk takes an order for advertising space in a newspaper.*

equipment from the company's warehouses. Inside order clerks receive orders from other workers employed by the same company or from salespersons in the field.

Many other order clerks, however, receive orders from outside companies or individuals. Order clerks in wholesale businesses, for instance, receive orders for merchandise from retail establishments that the retailer, in turn, sells to the public. An increasing number of order clerks work for catalogue companies and online retailers, receiving orders from individual customers by either phone, fax, regular mail, or e-mail. Order clerks dealing primarily with the public sometimes are referred to as outside order clerks.

Computers provide order clerks with ready access to information such as stock numbers, prices, and inventory. Orders frequently depend on which products are in stock and which products are most appropriate for the customer's needs. Some order clerks, especially those in industrial settings, must be able to give price estimates for entire jobs, not just single parts. Others must be able to take special orders, give expected arrival dates, prepare contracts, and handle complaints.

Many order clerks receive orders directly by telephone, entering the required information as the customer places the order. However, a rapidly increasing number of orders are now received through computer systems, the Internet, faxes, and e-mail. In some cases, these orders are sent directly from the customer's terminal to the order clerk's terminal. Orders received by regular mail are sometimes scanned into a database instantly accessible to clerks.

Clerks review orders for completeness and clarity. They may complete missing information or contact the customer for the information. Similarly, clerks contact customers, if customers need additional information, such as prices or shipping dates, or if delays in filling the order are anticipated. For orders received by regular mail, clerks extract checks or money orders, sort them, and send them for processing.

After an order has been verified and entered, the customer's final cost is calculated. The clerk then routes the order to the proper department—such as the warehouse—that actually sends out or delivers the item in question.

In organizations with sophisticated computer systems, inventory records are adjusted automatically, as sales are made. In less automated organizations, order clerks may adjust inventory records. Clerks may also notify other departments when inventories are low or when orders would deplete supplies.

Some order clerks must establish priorities in filling orders. For example, an order clerk in a blood bank may receive a request from a hospital for a certain type of blood. The clerk must first find out if the request is routine or an emergency and then take appropriate action.

### Employment

Order clerks held about 362,000 jobs in 1998. About one half were in wholesale and retail establishments and about one quarter in manufacturing firms. Most of the remaining jobs for order clerks were in business services.

### Job Outlook

Job openings for order clerks should be plentiful through the year 2008, due to sizable replacement needs. Numerous jobs will become available each year, to replace order clerks who transfer to other occupations or leave the labor force completely. Many of these openings will be for seasonal work, especially in catalogue companies or online retailers catering to holiday gift buyers.

Employment of order clerks is expected to grow more slowly than the average through the year 2008, as office automation continues to increase worker productivity. As the economy grows, increasingly more orders for goods and services will be placed. Demand for outside order clerks who deal mainly with the public or other businesses should remain fairly strong. The increasing use of online retailing and toll-free numbers that make placing orders easy and convenient will stimulate demand for these workers. However, productivity gains from increased

automation will offset some of the growth in demand for outside order clerks, as each clerk is able to handle an increasingly higher volume of orders. In addition, orders placed over the Internet and other computer systems are often entered directly into the computer by the customer; thus, the order clerk is not involved at all in placing the order.

Employment growth of inside clerks will also be constrained by productivity gains due to automation. The spread of electronic data interchange, a system enabling computers to communicate directly with each other, allows orders within establishments to be placed with little human intervention. Besides electronic data interchange, *extranets* and other systems allowing a firm's employees to place orders directly are increasingly common.

Other types of automation will also limit the demand for order clerks. Sophisticated inventory control and automatic billing systems allow companies to track inventory and accounts with much less help from order clerks than in the past. Some companies use automated phone menus accessible with a touch-tone phone to receive orders, and others use answering machines. Developments in voice recognition technology may also further reduce the demand for order clerks.

(See the introductory statement on record clerks for information on working conditions, training requirements, and earnings.)

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## Payroll and Timekeeping Clerks

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(O\*NET 55341)

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### Nature of the Work

Payroll and timekeeping clerks perform a vital function—ensuring that employees are paid on time and that their paychecks are accurate. If inaccuracies arise, such as monetary errors or incorrect amounts of vacation time, these workers research and correct the records. In addition, they may also perform various other clerical tasks.

The fundamental task of *timekeeping clerks* is distributing and collecting timecards each pay period. They review employee workcharts, timesheets, and timecards, to ensure that information is properly recorded and that records have the signatures of authorizing officials. In companies that bill for the time spent by staff, such as law or accounting firms, timekeeping clerks make sure the hours recorded are charged to the correct job, so clients can be properly billed. These clerks also review computer reports listing timecards that cannot be processed because of errors, and they contact the employee or the employee's supervisor to resolve the problem. In addition, timekeeping clerks are responsible for informing managers and other employees of procedural changes in payroll policies.



*Payroll and timekeeping clerks ensure that employees are paid on time and that their paychecks are accurate.*